

to consolidate its young democracy and to set an example for other developing countries in the region and around the world. Last November, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution I introduced that called upon the Government of Nigeria and the Independent National Electoral Commission to demonstrate a commitment to successful democratic elections and promised continued U.S. and international support for this effort. With the first set of votes just days away, I am disheartened by the poor performance of these individuals and institutions in the leadup to these historic polls.

Since GEN Olusegun Obasanjo took the helm of Nigeria's first civilian government in 15 years in 1999, the United States and the wider international community have made significant investments in assisting Nigeria's democratic transition in recognition of the country's strategic and symbolic importance. If this month's polls do not produce a legitimate, fairly elected government, however, the United States and our allies will need to reconsider our political and material support to Nigeria.

Following a violently contested election in 2003, President Obasanjo declared that his "initial assignment as President is trying to heal the wounds from the elections." Instead, in the runup to this month's polls, he has sparked fresh outrage by using the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, to limit competition, not promote it; by repressing dissent rather than encouraging free speech; by harassing domestic observers and obstructing the free and fair participation of opposition candidates. These abuses reveal the need for substantial electoral reform if Nigeria is to continue becoming a role model of democracy in Africa and around the world.

By almost all accounts, Nigeria is simply not ready to conduct this election, and the President and the Chairman of INEC should be held accountable for that failure. There is still time, however, to demonstrate a commitment to the democratic process by accrediting and facilitating the work of domestic and foreign election observers, approving and publicizing election procedures and polling places, and posting voter lists at each polling location. Transparent conduct of the polls to be held on April 14 and 21, including unrestricted access to polling places for election monitors, will bolster the credibility of President Obasanjo's government and INEC, which have been damaged by slow and incomplete preparations in past months.

Disrespect for the principles and processes of democracy threaten the gains that President Obasanjo's government has overseen in the past 8 years. Nigeria's recent economic growth, domestic security, and international reputation are all at stake because development, stability, and credibility cannot be sustained in a

dysfunctional political system. Regardless of the outcome of this month's elections, I urge all political leaders and their supporters to respect the rule of law, preserve the democratic process, and renounce violence.

This is a critical moment for Nigeria and for Africa. If problems related to this month's elections lead to unrest and instability in Nigeria, the impact could unsettle the region, indirectly by example and directly by weakening one of the most important forces for peace and progress on the continent. Under President Obasanjo's leadership, Nigeria has defended democracy throughout Africa by working with allies to reverse coups and efforts to undermine constitutional processes. Now the President has put his own democracy at risk, and the world is watching. Corruption, violence, repression, and obstruction of transparent, legitimate elections will not be tolerated by the international community, and Nigeria and its leaders will be judged accordingly.

#### RETIREMENT OF ROBERT D. EVANS

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I welcome this opportunity to pay tribute to Robert D. Evans, who retired on February 28, after 35 years of distinguished service with the American Bar Association, including services as director of the ABA's Governmental Affairs Office.

Born in Vermont, Bob received his B.A. from Yale University in 1966 and his law degree from the University of Michigan in 1969. He began his legal career at the Chicago firm known today as Sachnoff & Weaver, practicing corporate and commercial law. When an opportunity to work on public policy issues arose, he joined the ABA Chicago staff in 1972, and soon found himself working in the ABA's Washington, DC, office. Since 1982, Bob has served as director of the Governmental Affairs Office, providing strong leadership on many issues, including judicial independence, tax reform, the PATRIOT Act, and numerous anticrime and anti-terrorism bills. Perhaps what people will remember most is Bob's career-long effort to guarantee access to justice for all through the development and preservation of the Legal Services Corporation, which funds local legal aid programs to help low-income individuals and families deal with basic legal problems that affect day-to-day living.

Bob is listed in "Who's Who in America" and "Who's Who in American Law." He has received numerous awards and commendations for his dedicated and tireless work in seeking equal justice for America's poor, including recognition from the National Legal Aid and Defender Association and the National Clients Council.

Bob has also made outstanding contributions to Washington-area communities. He has served Washington

Grove, MD, as mayor and town council member, and currently sits on the Washington Grove Planning Commission. Bob has also chaired the Associations Division of the National Capital Area United Way Campaign, and has helped to raise millions of dollars for DC area charities to support those in need. He also was president of Project Northstar, a homeless children's tutoring program for homeless children in the District of Columbia.

With his dedication to the rule of law, his professionalism, his expertise and his unflinching good humor, Bob has fulfilled the highest ideals and goals of the legal profession. He has improved the administration of justice, and brought greater access to legal representation and American justice for all persons, regardless of their economic or social condition. Bob will be greatly missed. I join his many colleagues and friends in wishing Bob, his wife Kathie, and their daughter Sarah much happiness in the years to come.

#### HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS STEPHEN K. RICHARDSON

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today to humbly honor a Bridgeport, CT, soldier who lost his life in the service of our country: Private First Class Stephen K. Richardson.

On Tuesday, March 20, the 22-year-old Private First Class Richardson and another soldier were killed when a roadside bomb exploded near their vehicle in Baghdad. Now Stephen is being remembered for his spirit of service, for his devotion to his country, and for his love of his family.

Stephen served with the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry, 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, which has been charged with securing Baghdad. Private First Class Richardson took on that mission willingly: "He wanted to be part of America's protection," said his grandmother, Ina Jackson. "He wanted to help resolve the problems in Iraq." Like nearly every other soldier who has enlisted since the start of the Iraq war, Private First Class Richardson knew exactly where he was going and exactly what risks he'd be facing which makes his sacrifice all the more admirable.

Those who were close to Stephen know just what a fine young life has been cut off. Edward Geist, a professor at the University of Bridgeport, remembers teaching him. "He was older than my other students he took the work more seriously," said Professor Geist. He still remembers an essay Private First Class Richardson wrote about his future plans returning to his family's home in Jamaica and starting a business to help improve living conditions. "It was much more reflective and serious than what we normally get," Stephen's professor said. I think that seriousness of purpose was exactly what drove Private First Class Richardson to serve his country and a glimpse of the bright future he might have had in store.